

**Athens City Schools**  
**Foundational Literacy Skills Plan**

**Approved: May 27, 2021**

This Foundational Literacy Skills Plan has been approved by the Tennessee Department of Education and meets the requirements of the *Tennessee Literacy Success Act*. All portions of the Foundational Literacy Skills plan were submitted to the department and approved. To view the supplemental artifacts, please contact the district directly.

**Daily Foundational Literacy Skills Instruction in Grades K-2**

**K-2 Reading Foundations Skills Block**

Athens City Schools adopted Expeditionary Learning (EL) Foundational Skills Curriculum grounded in reading science, aligned to Tennessee ELA standards, and approved by the State Textbook and Instructional Materials Quality Commission. EL curriculum uses foundational skills as the primary form of instruction, designating a 60-minute block for foundational skills instruction. As such, the Skills Block is meant to ensure that, by the end of grade 2, students acquire the depth of skills they need in the Reading Foundations standards to navigate grade-level text independently.

The K-2 Skills Block is divided into four eight-week-long modules that span an entire year. Each module is broken into seven five-day “cycles” of instruction. These cycles include an intentional sequence of Instructional Practices (simple routines such as Chaining or Spelling to Complement Reading), each of which builds on the learning from the previous lesson and connects to the next lesson’s learning. Every eight-week module includes a flex week of five days. These days can be used at the teacher’s discretion throughout the cycle for reteaching or making up for an abbreviated school week. The skills block is divided into two major chunks: 15-20 minutes of whole group instruction and 40-45 minutes of differentiated small group instruction, including independent work time. The teacher meets with 2-3 differentiated small groups based on student microphases.

The benchmark assessment is administered at the beginning, middle, and end of the year to place students into a reading phase. Teachers provide learning opportunities to meet the needs of students based on their phase. Depending on the grade level, cycle assessments are administered every cycle to 1-2 times per module to assess students’ progress toward mastery of skills taught up to a given point in the curriculum. Cycle assessments also support teachers in helping students set personal goals around reading proficiency.

**Phases of reading development:**

**Pre-Alphabetic:** Student is not yet making any alphabetic connections. Student may recognize some letters (e.g., letters in own name) and environmental print (e.g., “Stop” on stop sign).

**Partial Alphabetic:** Student is making partial alphabetic connections. Student is beginning to decode and encode CVC and VC words, but frequently confuses vowels and vowel sounds.

Full Alphabetic: Student is making full alphabetic connections. Student is able to decode and encode all regularly spelled, one-syllable words and some multisyllabic words.

Consolidated Alphabetic: Student uses knowledge of syllable types to decode and encode multisyllabic words.

Student is continually growing bank of high-frequency and irregularly spelled words.

Next year, our focus in foundational skills instruction is to strengthen differentiation for small group instruction.

### **Daily Foundational Literacy Skills Instruction in Grades 3-5**

Athens City Schools has an integrated literacy block for grades three through five grounded in reading science and aligned to Tennessee ELA standards. Our curriculum materials are selected from those approved by the state Textbook and Instructional Materials Quality Commission. During the integrated ELA block that meets an evidence-based approach to applying foundational skills within daily lessons, our students receive a total of 125 minutes of ELA instruction.

Module lessons explicitly teach and formally assess all literacy standards. There are four modules per grade level with each module requiring 8-9 weeks of instruction, broken into three shorter units. All modules use rich, authentic texts throughout. All daily instruction includes components of knowledge-building for 80-90 minutes per day. Students in grades 3-5 consistently read complex text to gain deeper content knowledge of the topic and further familiarize themselves with the structures, syntax, and vocabulary of complex text. The curriculum also engages students in work around fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. The fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension skills are not taught in isolation, but are embedded within the lesson to ensure continuity, cohesion, and connection.

Foundational skills instruction is embedded throughout the content modules including morphology, grammar, spelling, writing, and fluency. ALL (Additional Language and Literacy) Block (45 minutes of daily instruction) then gives students the differentiated practice and support required to demonstrate mastery of those skills. Students are provided opportunities to practice with all aspects of word study in a variety of activities, including vocabulary games, vocabulary squares, and Frayer Models. In addition, students read more fluently when they have a greater understanding of the standard conventions of written English. These skills are addressed within the GUM (Grammar, Usage, and Mechanics) portion of ALL Block.

Explicit vocabulary instruction is a key feature of the Expeditionary Learning Curriculum in grades 3-5. In addition to this explicit vocabulary instruction, students receive implicit instruction in general academic and domain-specific vocabulary through exposure to a large variety of complex informational and literary texts.

Each module includes a final performance task that is a more supported project, often involving research and six assessments (two per unit) requiring students to complete an independent task on reading, writing, speaking, and/or listening. Additionally, students in grades 3-5 who have not benchmarked “consolidated alphabetic late” participate in the EL foundational skills benchmark assessment three times per year. These students will continue to receive instruction in the

appropriate reading phase. During intervention time, teachers provide learning opportunities to meet the needs of students based on their phase. Cycle assessments are administered every cycle to 1-2 times per module to assess students' progress toward mastery of skills taught up to a given point in the curriculum. Cycle assessments also support teachers in helping students set personal goals around reading proficiency.

Athens City's focus in literacy instruction in grades 3-5 next year is to strengthen the implementation of ALL Block through collaborative planning and professional development.

### **Approved Instructional Materials for Grades K-2**

LearnZillion - K-5 Expeditionary Learning

### **Approved Instructional Materials for Grades 3-5**

LearnZillion - K-5 Expeditionary Learning

### **Universal Reading Screener for Grades K-5. This screener complies with RTI<sup>2</sup> and Say Dyslexia requirements.**

All students will participate in the universal screening three times per year.

- TBD: Grades K-5 - Star Early Literacy/Star Reading, and CBMs OR the Tennessee Universal reading screener

(Both comply with RTI2 and Say Dyslexia Law)

- Grades K-2 - EL Foundational Skills Benchmark

### **Intervention Structure and Supports**

All students participate in the universal screening in the fall, winter, and spring. The purpose of the assessments is to determine which students are at-risk for a significant reading deficiency or identified with a significant reading deficiency. Instructional coaches share results with grade level teachers during PLCs. Results are compared to other sources of data to confirm or challenge. In addition to Tier I instruction for all students, Tier II and Tier III instruction is provided for students scoring below the 25<sup>th</sup>tile on the universal screener.

- Students scoring below the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile will be identified as needing Tier II instruction.
- Students scoring below the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile will be identified as needing Tier III instruction.

Students scoring below the 25<sup>th</sup>tile on the universal screening receive more intense intervention using research-based materials and strategies in Tier II. Tier II requires high-quality intervention matched to students' needs and provided by trained personnel in a group of five to eight students in grades K-5. The ELA intervention provides 30 minutes of additional small group instruction per day in addition to Tier I instruction daily during a grade level time in the master schedule.

Students scoring below the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile receive Tier III intervention in addition to receiving Tier I instruction. Tier III provides support to students who have not made adequate progress with Tier II

interventions or who are significantly below grade level in reading and writing skills. Tier III instruction involves intensive instruction, in groups of three to five students in grades K-5 providing research-based materials and strategies that meet the specific needs of each student. Tier III intervention will consist of a minimum of 45-minute sessions five days a week delivered by a trained instructor and implemented with fidelity during a grade level time in the master schedule.

We have research-based options for reading intervention support available to our students who are “at-risk” and/or who have been identified with a significant reading deficiency. Our recently adopted ELA curriculum contains an assessment and remediation guide in which teachers can find activities that directly address skill gaps. They can tailor this to the needs of their RTI group of students. If that intervention is not proving to be effective, more comprehensive, strategic interventions (such as SPIRE) become an option.

Students are also screened using additional survey level assessments to determine if they have characteristics of dyslexia. Students who do demonstrate those characteristics receive more intense intervention using research-based materials and strategies receive intensive intervention as outlined in the Say Dyslexia Law using programs that meet the law’s requirements. Our district notifies families of students who demonstrate characteristics of dyslexia. Families are notified that the Foundational Skills curriculum is used to support those students, as it is based on the Orton-Gillingham approach of systematic, explicit, sequential, phonics-based instruction and is considered a strong support for those students. Intervention takes place daily during a grade-level time in the master schedule just for RTI.

Tier II and III students are progress monitored every 10 days of instruction with parents receiving a progress report every 4.5 weeks. Data teams meet every 4 weeks to review progress using data from formative assessments and progress monitoring data to determine if a change in instruction is needed. The data team also considers other variables (attendance, engagement). This data informs whether to continue, discontinue, recommend a more intense tier or consider eligibility for special education services.

### **Parent Notification Plan/Home Literacy Reports**

At the onset of the school year, a RTI2 brochure is sent home to all parents explaining the RTI2 process. Our district notifies parents in grades K-5 if their child is “at-risk” for or has a significant reading deficiency (as evidenced by students scoring in the 0-25th percentile) immediately after the district’s schools complete the fall universal screening. Students’ scores are communicated in parent-friendly language that provides a clear explanation of student skill gaps and the depth and extent of student needs. The parents are told what intervention their student will receive and the amount of time each day the student will receive services. This is coupled with a description of the importance of being able to read by the end of 3rd grade. The district defines how students are assessed and what a “significant reading deficiency” means. Parents are subsequently notified of their child’s progress, or lack of progress, after the 4 ½ week data team meetings. In the parent notifications/communication, data teams note any changes being made if the child is not showing sufficient progress as evidenced by progress monitoring and universal screening data as well as recommended activities (that do not require purchased resources) that will support students in the area of deficit (activities are not tailored by child, but tailored by skill deficit generally). These

communications go out to parents with students in grades K-3 three times annually and are shared in grades 4 and 5 annually.

Additionally, the ELA curriculum contains parent letters in the younger grades that outline the foundational skills and knowledge domains for the coming week that will inform and equip parents to work with the child. Families can better understand how to support their student(s) through questions about their texts and through an awareness of what foundational skills their child(ren) are learning.

### **Professional Development Plan**

December 2020-January 2021: TNTP worked directly with K-2 teachers in a series of grade level meetings. Training supported teachers in developing a deep understanding of the explicit and systematic reading foundational skills in the EL materials to meet the needs of students and ensure rigorous and effective instruction. Specifically, over the course of 4 sessions per grade level, participants:

- Explored the reading research supporting reading development and understand how the EL Skills Block is designed to cultivate these competencies through analysis of the structure of the skills block cycles and lessons.
- Built an understanding of how the K-2 continuum of skills reflect Tennessee's rigorous standards (including understanding of the microphases and progression of skill development across K-2, orientation to the range of assessments)
- Engaged in a replicable protocol for preparing at the cycle/lesson level for instruction (including understanding of the key instructional routines).

April-June 2021: Reading 360 Early Literacy Training developed by the Tennessee Department of Education.

- April-May: PreK-5 teachers, interventionists, and special education teachers will engage in Course 1 of the Early Literacy Training series, asynchronously. This training will focus on foundational reading development and instruction and is grounded in a phonics-based approach. Teachers participating in Week 2 training will earn a completion certificate prior to starting Course 2 training. Teachers participating in Course 2 training will earn a completion certificate prior to starting Week 2 training.
- June 1-4, Athens City is hosting Course 2 of the Early Literacy Training series. In addition to K-5 classroom teachers, participants include interventionists, special education teachers, and instructional leaders. Course 2 training will focus on practical classroom application of research findings around strong instruction in phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, phonics fluency, and vocabulary. Educators must have a passing score of 80 or above on Course 2 Assessment.
- June 2022: Training will be provided to PreK and K-5 teachers unable to attend summer 2021 training.

August 2021-June 2023

- Athens City Schools is participating in the Early Literacy Networks. Over the next two years, this grant will provide our district with additional funding and support to focus on the implementation of foundational skills and knowledge-building curricula in grades PreK–2. Within the Early Literacy Network, we will be grouped with other district to focus on solving similar problems of practice, sharing resources, and developing implementation support strategies focused on early literacy.

#### Embedded Professional Development

- Instructional coaches support teachers through co-planning, in-class coaching, modeling, data analysis, and co-teaching.
- Teachers attend weekly PLCs focusing on continuous improvement to improve outcomes for students.